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Giving a Listening Ear: Male Student Teachers' Experiences and Perspectives of Practicum Supervision

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Giving a Listening Ear: Male Student Teachers' Experiences and Perspectives of Practicum Supervision

Abstract

Exploring the minute number of male teachers within the classroom is certainly not a new discourse as teaching has increasingly become a feminised profession. Therefore, as male student teachers take on the challenge of becoming teachers, it is imperative that we listen to them as they recount their supervision experiences. These experiences are significantly influenced and impacted by teacher educators and cooperating teachers who are tasked with the responsibility to provide high quality and effective supervision, especially during teaching practicum. Additionally, acknowledging that to attain positive outcomes attached to student teaching experiences, Hunt et al. (2015) have reasoned that teaching practicum is essential in the process of developing quality teachers. Thus, the quality of supervision male student teachers need is heavily dependent on the capacity and expertise of those who supervise them. However, Slick (as cited in Bates & Burbank, 2008) posited that within teacher training programmes and colleges, student teacher supervision is not highly regarded. The purpose, therefore, of this study was to explore, through a phenomenological qualitative nature, the experiences, and perceptions that three final year male student teachers have of the quality and level of supervision they received from college supervisors and cooperating teachers throughout teaching practicum. The insights shared, therefore, provide a reference point to influence the practice and dispositions of college supervisors and cooperating teachers. Additionally, this study provides a premise to conduct additional studies of male student teachers' experiences and perceptions of teaching practicum and supervision, especially within the Jamaican context.

Keywords

male student teacher, college supervisor, cooperating teacher, teaching practicum, developmental supervision

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guidance to augment my qualitative research skills.

Giving a Listening Ear: Male Student Teachers' Experiences and Perspectives of Practicum Supervision

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Exploring the minute number of male teachers within the classroom is certainly not a new discourse as teaching has increasingly become a feminised profession. Therefore, as male student teachers take on the challenge of becoming teachers, it is imperative that we listen to them as they recount their supervision experiences. These experiences are significantly influenced and impacted by teacher educators and cooperating teachers who are tasked with the responsibility to provide high quality and effective supervision, especially during teaching practicum. Additionally, acknowledging that to attain positive outcomes attached to student teaching experiences, Hunt et al. (2015) have reasoned that teaching practicum is essential in the process of developing quality teachers. Thus, the quality of supervision male student teachers need is heavily dependent on the capacity and expertise of those who supervise them. However, Slick (as cited in Bates & Burbank, 2008) posited that within teacher training programmes and colleges, student teacher supervision is not highly regarded. The purpose, therefore, of this study was to explore, through a phenomenological qualitative nature, the experiences, and perceptions that three final year male student teachers have of the quality and level of supervision they received from college supervisors and cooperating teachers throughout teaching practicum. The insights shared, therefore, provide a reference point to influence the practice and dispositions of college supervisors and cooperating teachers. Additionally, this study provides a premise to conduct additional studies of male student teachers' experiences and perceptions of teaching practicum and supervision, especially within the Jamaican context.

Keywords: male student teacher, college supervisor, cooperating teacher, teaching practicum, developmental supervision

The approach to teacher education in Jamaica has remained relatively stagnant since the establishment of normal schools. It is no surprise that Hordatt-Gentles (2003) declared, "many of the old, colonial beliefs about the nature and purpose of teaching held fast, contributing to the persistence of authoritarian pedagogy in schools and Jamaican teachers' colleges" (p. 116). Generally, the approach to teacher education has sought to intertwine four areas into the formation of prospective teachers. Gutek (2013) identified these four areas as: (a) general education courses, (b) content area specialization courses, (c) education foundations, psychology, and methods, and (d) field experience often taking the form of teaching practice. As Zeichner (2002) declared, and which is similar to the Jamaican teacher training context, the capstone for most teacher training programs is the element of teaching practicum which affords student teachers the opportunity to put theory into practice under the guidance of their supervisors. Jamaican student teachers pursuing teacher training at local teachers' college undergo a four-year program of study which requires them to specialize in a content area and to participate in four phases of teaching practicum. During these practicum

engagements, student teachers are supervised as they learn how to plan and delivery instruction, management their classrooms and perform non-academic duties. However, Slick (as cited in Bates & Burbank, 2008) has argued that the supervisor often assumes the role of an evaluator who is seen as interfering in the classrooms of public schools.

The teaching practicum process encapsulates primarily three individuals: the (male) student teacher, the cooperating teacher, and the college supervisor. Hunt, Mitchell, Maina, and Griffin (2015) have advanced that this triad, though individually distinct, should work cohesively during the teaching practice experience. Admittedly, based on my experiences and observations, there have been times when there are disparities among the aforementioned parties. Notwithstanding, Caires and Almeida (2007) asserted factors such as involvement, proximity, support and respect are integral contributing factors to the interaction between the college supervisor and the student teacher.

While the matter of who is the most suitable supervisor for the student teacher is debatable, Kent (2001) articulated cooperating teachers may be more suited to supervise student teachers whether they (the cooperating teachers) have adequate training in supervision. This approach to student teacher supervision, known as the shared supervision model, is also supported by Melser (2004). She asserted that the student teacher encounters the cooperating teacher daily, and, therefore, that cooperating teacher is the most qualified to monitor and observe the growth of the student teacher. It is therefore on these premises that this qualitative study sought to explore how three final year male student teachers describe their experiences and perspectives of the quality and level of supervision they received during their teaching practicum.

Statement of Problem

As a teacher educator, one of my primary responsibilities involves working with student teachers as they undergo teaching practicum as well as in-service teachers as they provide supervision. In this capacity, I have witnessed how the level and quality of supervision given to student teachers impact their general performance during teaching practicum and their overall dispositions as emerging educators. Male student teachers are significantly outnumbered by their female counterparts within the institution which was selected as the research site. In fact, since its establishment over a century ago, the institution only opened its doors to prospective male teachers in 2001. Nonetheless, all student teachers undergo the four phases of teaching practicum. In addition, based on my observations, some student teachers do better than others based on the number of supervised visits they would have received as well as the quality of the supervision conferences in which they would have participated.

Weller (1983) proposed: "Little attention has been given to those competencies deemed essential for effective supervision of students by supervising teachers" (p. 213). As teacher educators in Jamaica, we often employ the "circuit rider" approach, given the additional duties attached to the post. The circuit rider approach to supervision requires college supervisors to periodically visit student teachers in different schools while facilitating courses at the college among other duties. Moreover, Andrew and Jelmberg (2010) advanced complaints about course work and supervision are common among students and school personnel. It must also be noted that Hordatt-Gentles and Newman (2016) cited in former years, the shortage of teaching staff at the teachers' college level resulted in the employment of teacher educators or lecturers who are less qualified than they should have been.

Purpose of the Study

Student teacher supervision is one of the key components of teacher preparation and as “gate keepers” college supervisors, in conjunction with cooperating teachers, play an integral role in the successful completion of teaching practicum by student teachers. Thus, the purpose of this phenomenological qualitative study sought to explore the experiences and perspectives that three final year male student teachers have of the level and quality of supervision received during teaching practicum from their college supervisors and cooperating teachers. In light of the qualitative nature of this study and the limited number of final year male student teachers at the research site, only three of them were asked to participate in the study given their dispositions and observations of them.

Research Questions

In exploring the topic of how three male student teachers view the quality and level of supervision received during teaching practicum, this research study was guided by the following questions:

1. How do three final year male student teachers view themselves as emerging teachers?
2. How do three final year male student teachers describe the quality and level of practicum supervision received from their college supervisors and cooperating teachers?

Significance of Study

The exploration of male student teachers’ experiences of practicum supervision has several implications for a number of stakeholders directly linked to teacher training, recruitment, and employment. The teaching practicum process is a triad which involves the student teacher, the cooperating teacher, and the college supervisor. Consequently, as educators who work directly in the field of supervising student teachers, the usefulness of this study seeks to improve our craft as education practitioners. Similarly, our fellow colleagues may find it worthwhile to further explore male teacher education and training. This study will seek to evoke a sense of consciousness in cooperating teachers when they are asked to supervise student teachers. Finally, though a minute sample, these male student teachers have been afforded the opportunity to have their voices captured in a scholarly way which should impact the practice of teacher educators. After all, I concur with Labaree (2000) when he asserted mastery of content area is insufficient for a teacher to be effective.

It is also my intention that the Curriculum Board and the Joint Board of Teacher Education, Jamaica, will revisit how supervision is conducted and the impact it has on student teachers as they are being prepared for the classroom. As Darling-Hammond (2010) concluded, given teacher education provides the necessary certification, the curriculum becomes ineffective if the requisite skills and dispositions of student teachers do not meet the demands of the classroom.

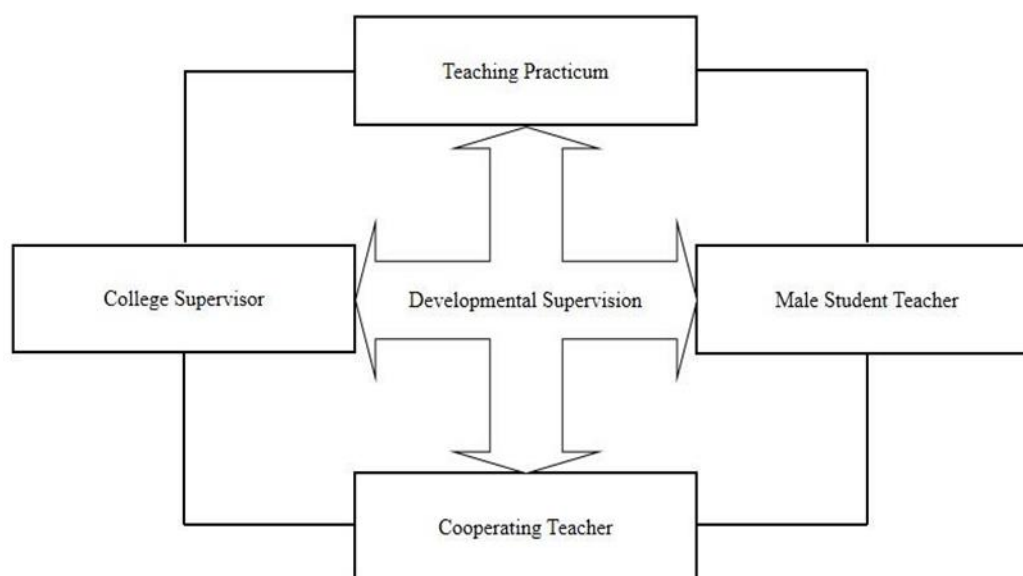
Theoretical Framework

The graphical representation below was developed as the framework that guided this study in exploring the experiences and perspectives that three male student teachers have of

their teaching practicum supervision. As shown, the supervision of student teachers is linked primarily by five elements: teaching practicum, development supervision, and the student teaching triad. In the context of this study, the student teaching triad is comprised of the male student teachers, the college supervisor, and the cooperating teacher. The framework of this study pulls on the theory of developmental supervision as put forward by Glickman in the 1980s.

Figure 1

Male Student Teacher Supervision Framework



In exploring the phenomenon of developmental supervision within the Jamaican teacher training context, it is imperative to explore some of the immediate factors which influence the quality of supervision experienced by male student teachers. Goh and Blake (2015) described the transition that student teachers undergo from a position of being the student in the classroom to being the teacher as a feat which is not always easy. Undoubtedly, it is for this reason why Cavanagh and Prescott (2011) concluded supervisors are afforded the opportunity to impact the lives of student teachers in an effort to see the betterment of the teaching profession.

To better appreciate the current state of teacher education and an element of the model utilized within the Jamaican context today, it is important to understand a basic foundation which underpins teacher education. Gutek (2013) credited James G. Carter for his contribution to teacher education. Carter, according to Gutek was of the belief that “prospective teachers needed practice teaching experiences guided by more experienced mentor teachers” (p. 5). Within the Jamaican context, student teachers are currently exposed to four different phases of practice teaching. After all, if student teachers are to understand their identities and roles as prospective teachers, the practicum experience is a necessity (Clarke & Elfert, 2015).

For each teaching practicum phase, student teachers are assigned college supervisors. However, the fourth phase could be the most crucial of the phases. Additionally, when student teachers enter the schools to conduct teaching, they are assigned a cooperating teacher or cooperating teachers in alignment with the subject area specialization and grade levels. These three parties, the student teacher, the college supervisor, and the cooperating teacher, now form what is the “Student Teaching Triad.” This triad, as described by Hunt et al. (2015), is a collective body which works in a cohesive manner throughout the teaching practicum activity.

Ozyildirim and Asku (2016) advanced that human beings are the input and output of the school which is an educational organization, and it is on this premise that supervision plays an integral role. It is therefore not a surprise that Kent (2001) opined one of the main objectives of clinical supervision is to enhance the neophyte teacher's ability to evaluate his or her own teaching. Therefore, in meeting this need, Glickman and Gordon (1987) sought to foster teacher growth through his developmental model of clinical supervision. According to Glickman and Gordon (1987), the three tenets which undergird developmental supervision are: (a) teachers operate at varying levels of professional development based on their experiences and their backgrounds, (b) teachers are in need of supervision because of their differing levels of thought, ability and effectiveness, and (c) the ultimate goal of supervision is to equip teachers to become more reflective practitioners, who through self-directed initiatives, can find solutions to instructional problems to meet the needs of their students.

While the responsibilities of the college supervisor and the cooperating teacher may vary, Nolan and Hoover (2004), contended through scaffolding and developmentally appropriate feedback and support, supervisors guide student teachers' initiation into the profession. It must also be noted that Nolan and Hoover (2004) credited nurturing a climate that promotes reflection and inquiry.

As has been advanced by researchers such as Caires and Almeida (2007), the help of the college supervisor and cooperating teacher is crucial to the effectiveness and productivity of teaching practicum. Botwinik and Press (2013) also underscored the possible impact of supervisors and mentors on student teachers as supervisors assist in refining student teachers' capabilities and provide guidance in surviving the practicalities of the school setting. However, asserting that very little is done to prepare cooperating teachers for the role of supervisors to student teachers, Clarke and Elfert (2015) have advanced cooperating teachers rely primarily on their own experiences as student teachers in providing guidance to their subjects.

In light of the above arguments and the purpose of this research study, the framework captures the student teaching triad, the practicum exercise and the developmental supervision theory. The review of the literature for this study therefore sought to further explore each element of the framework on which this study was built.

Review of Literature

The Male (Student) Teacher

This study utilised male student teachers as its participants and consequently, based on the composition of the student teaching triad, they would be the recipients of assistance and mentorship from their college supervisors and the cooperating teachers during practicum. Having completed a majority of coursework content in areas of specialization and teaching methodology, student teachers are then confronted by the reality of a teacher practitioner. Apart from only providing instruction in the classroom during practicum, the student teachers engage in general teacher activities which are non-instructional in nature as well as activities that promote metacognitive development (Hunt et al., 2015).

On the premise of the framework of this study, it was imperative to review some statistics regarding male enrolment at the research site. Additionally, we acknowledge Washington's (2009) declaration that there is a gender gap which exists in institutions of higher education and the impact of the availability of men as role models in elementary and secondary schools. For the past four academic years the matriculation numbers revealed a great disparity in the number of males who have entered teacher training versus their female counterparts. For the 2014-2015 academic year, data reveal that a total of 608 students were registered in the teacher training programme. Of this total 556 were female student teachers while the remaining

52 were males. During the 2015-2016 academic year 585 students were registered which was broken down into 528 females and 57 males. A total of 579 student teachers were accounted for during the 2016-2017 academic year. This total consisted of 520 females and 59 males. For 2017-2018 academic year, 428 female student teachers and 63 male student teachers have been accounted for based on the statistics of the institution. These latter figures therefore equate to 491 student teachers. It must be noted, however, that at the time when the matriculation statistics were obtained not all students had registered for the 2017-2018 academic year.

Johnson (2008) advanced that despite the various education reforms witnessed throughout the years, the scarcity of men in teaching is not a new phenomenon. Hence, male teachers could be referred to as “the endangered species.” It is also crucial to understand why scholars have supported the call for male teachers to be present inside the classrooms. Martino and Rezai-Rashti (2010) believed “the call for more male role models has often been linked to the problematic ways to a moral panic about the underachieving boy and the feminization of teaching” (p. 249). However, Smith (2004) suggested that while some male teachers are not perturbed by assuming roles of male role models, others reject same on the premise that their primary responsibilities included educating, not substituting as a parent. Though the general impact of the male presence seems to evoke positive responses for students, it is also likely that the male teachers themselves do have their own struggles to confront. After all, while the masculinity of male teachers is their most prized asset it is also their greatest burden (Fordice & Nielsen, 2013). Washington (2009) articulated that there are those who opine that “real men” do not work with children, especially younger children. It must be noted, however, that the “endangered species” once permeated the teaching profession but Washington (2009) added that the exodus of men from the profession occurred in the mid-19th century when they ventured into the realm of industry and business.

Teaching Practicum

Within the Jamaican context and elsewhere in the world, teacher training programmes require student teachers to conduct practice teaching or field experience. Teaching practicum provides the opportunity for teacher training institutions worldwide to address the issue of preparing student teachers for the actual world of teaching (Goh & Mathews, 2011). Additionally, Labaree (2000) argued teachers are not effective professionals if they have only mastered content area. Hence, teaching practicum is the platform for student teachers to commence their development as teacher practitioners, but, as Mpofu and Maphalala (2017) caution, teaching requires thinkers and not necessarily technicians.

The teaching practicum serves as an opportunity for student teachers to demonstrate, within the context of a classroom, their ability to apply practical and theoretical knowledge (Goh & Blake, 2015). Goh and Mathews (2011) stated teaching practicum is the avenue through which student teachers respond to circumstances which are unique to the field experience. These circumstances, they believe, are not present in campus-based learning. In fact, Hunt et al. (2015) concluded that in developing qualified teachers, teaching practicum has become fundamental to the process of attaining positive outcomes related to student teaching experiences.

Within the Caribbean context, it is not surprising that Griffith (2005) contends the teaching practicum component in teacher training has received very little attention. In addition, Rooft (2015) advanced that teacher preparation within the Jamaican context fails to adequately prepare student teachers for the political, social, and economic issues which exist in schools. After all, it is through practicum that student teachers are likely to be exposed to sub-cultures which exist within the Jamaican context (Rooft & Cook, 2017). These arguments underscore the importance of the teaching practicum element of teacher training programs in any given

context. Griffith (2005) posited that practicum provides student teachers with more than an opportunity to develop and practise their teaching skills. He argues that the exercise affords student teachers the prospect of managing a classroom daily.

Currently, the four-year Bachelor of Education degree program offered by the Teachers' Colleges of Jamaica (TCJ) in collaboration with The University of the West Indies (UWI), Mona, exposes student teachers to four phases of practicum – one per academic year for the four-year program of study. The first phase, however, is an introductory phase which affords student teachers the platform to observe teaching and learning within a school context. This observation lasts for a period of one week. During phases two, three, and four, student teachers lead the teaching and learning processes for two, four and twelve weeks, respectively.

In his proposal of a revised model to enhance the practical teaching element of teacher training within the Caribbean, Griffith (2005) suggested a five-phase practicum model. As proposed, during phase one student teachers will conduct observations within a school. This of course is similar to the current practice. Phase two would allow student teachers to continue observations while learning to construct unit and lesson plans. The third phase would provide student teachers with an opportunity to deliver instruction under the guidance of a cooperating teacher. During the ultimate phase, the student teacher would assume full responsibility for teaching a class and would be assessed for his or her teaching competence and the submission of a portfolio which he or she would have started during phase one. The final phase of Griffith's proposed model would require student teachers to conduct a yearlong internship at an assigned school. The aim of the concluding phase would seek to continue the student teachers' exposure within the classroom but also to focus on areas such as professional development, classroom management skills, confidence level, as well as assessment techniques. The areas of focus which Griffith recommends for the fifth phase of his proposal are currently assessed in the already implemented four-year model. Fortunately, or unfortunately, however, Griffith's proposal has not made its way into teacher training programs in Jamaica.

The College Supervisor and the Cooperating Teacher

Niess (2008) articulated future teachers must be ready to rethink, unlearn and relearn, revise, change, and adapt. Thus, if Niess's pronouncements were to be actualized, the roles of the college supervisor and the cooperating teacher become crucial. Bates and Burbank (2008) theorize the supervisors' role becomes vital as student teachers should be provided with experiences that encourage alternative ways of examining teaching. While the literature reveals that there are diverse views on who is best suited to supervise student teachers, Weller (1983) has argued student teacher supervisors must be exemplary and of the highest caliber. Botwinik and Press (2013) postulated, "supervisors and mentors not only assist in fine tuning the art of teaching but also teach student teachers and new hires how to thrive and survive the practicalities of the school setting" (p. 125). In addition, Sharp (2001) is of the view that those who supervise student teachers should own "effective teaching practices, observation skills, conferencing skills and evaluation skills" (p. 55).

Cooperating teachers, as defined by Jones, Kelsey, and Brown (2014), "are idealized as seasoned professionals, proficient in their craft, able to transmit tacit knowledge to pre-service teachers (mentees) through demonstration, conversation and coaching" (p. 33). In Griffith's (2005) estimation, a primary duty that the cooperating teacher will assume is that of facilitating the student teacher in experiencing the realities and demands of the classroom. Griffith (2005) also posited cooperating teachers are better suited, in some ways, to provide supervision to the student teacher when compared to the college supervisor who visits the student teacher only occasionally. It is also noted that Rooffe and Cook (2017) agreed that the cooperating teacher play a significant role in developing student teachers, but they are of the belief that it is

imperative for cooperating teachers to be prepared for their supervisory role. Ediger (2000) contended, however, both the student teacher and the cooperating teacher need the support of the college supervisor in order for the student teacher to develop professionally.

The college supervisor, as an element of the triad, has various roles and responsibilities. Metzler (as cited in Hunt et al., 2015) put forward the argument that, given their training and experience, college supervisors are the most competent in providing student teachers with the supervision that is needed. Additionally, as was stated earlier, the transition from student to teacher may not always be a smooth one for student teachers. Nolan and Hoover (2004) affirmed that supervisors who are aware of the phases of transition that student teachers undergo are better able to facilitate the student teachers' progress and growth. According to Conway and Clark (2003), Fuller's 1970s model which is a refined three-stage model views these as: stage 1 – concerns about self (survival), stage 2 – concerns about tasks or situations (tasks), and stage 3- concerns about impact on students (impact) During the survival phase, student teachers are described as egocentric as they are primarily concerned with their abilities or inabilities to meet the demands of the job. Refining their skills or striving for a superior level of command of the content would be the second phase which is also called the task phase. Upon achieving phase two, competence and confidence are signs that the student teacher has attained the third phase – impact. At this point, the student teacher reflects on how his or her actions will impact students in positive ways. Undoubtedly, for these reasons, Nolan and Hoover (2004) declared that supervisors should guide student teachers through scaffolding, inquiry and reflection and providing feedback and support. It is important to note that in order to guide student teachers through these phases there is the need to understand and apply developmental supervision.

Developmental Supervision

In an effort to understand developmental supervision, it is prudent to establish some basic foundations and principles of supervision within the context of education. Marzano, Frontier, and Livingston (2011) are of the view that “the purpose of supervision should be to the enhancement of teachers' pedagogical skills, with the ultimate goals of enhancing student achievement” (p. 2). Sullivan and Glanz (2009) believed that concepts such as collegiality, collaboration, assistance, and improvement of instruction permeate the literature which surrounds clinical supervision. In addition, Rose et al. (2005) have advanced that some terms which embody the roles involved in clinical supervision are: field supervisor, coach, mentor, professional supervisor, clinical educator, and preceptor.

According to Ozyildirim and Asku (2016), Glickman's developmental supervision model is grounded in the belief that teachers, who are people, develop at different paces based on stage of development and that they behave differently. Consequently, Clarke and Collins (2004) identified the three supervisory approaches to developmental supervision – directive, collaborative, and nondirective. Sullivan and Glanz (2005) have since explored these three approaches. Their exploration reveals that when the directive approach is used the supervisee proceeds based on the decisions of the supervisor. However, the collaborative approach requires the supervisee and the supervisor to collectively engage in conversations to identify possible solutions to difficulties encountered by the student teacher. When the nondirective approach is employed, the supervisor permits the student teacher to arrive at his or her own decisions through careful reflection and progress in development in an effort to improve students' experiences in the classroom.

While others have credited and criticized Glickman's developmental supervision model, it must be noted that Glickman and Gordon (1987) admitted this model “has generated a great deal of interest, application, research, as well as some misinterpretation” (p. 64). On

this premise, Glickman and Gordon declare the theory concerns understanding the aim of our aim as teacher practitioners and supervisors in relation to ourselves and others. Glickman and Gordon (1987) also caution that developmental supervision is not a contingency theory, nor does it confine teachers to categories.

Summary

Built on the theory of Glickman's developmental supervision, the framework of this study captures the student teaching triad which comprises the college supervisor, the student teacher, and the cooperating teacher. The reviewed literature explored implications for all three parties, as well as the impact the college supervisor and the cooperating teacher could have on the student teacher. However, important to the process is the practicum or teaching practice experience which provides the avenue for the members of the triad to work cohesively to ultimately improve the student teachers' effectiveness. The student teachers though, within the context of this research, are males who form the minority group in higher education enrolment. This has earned them the title of the endangered species. Though the literature revealed some males, by virtue of being teachers, assume role model duties, especially to boys. However, others reject the responsibility as they strive to maintain their masculinity which is sometimes questioned as a result of the fact that they now work in a female dominated profession.

Research Design

It has been over a century since teacher training has been offered by the site which was selected. However, despite the many years of its existence, it has been less than twenty years since this teachers' college started to offer teacher training to prospective male teachers. Hence, in light of the purpose of this study which sought to explore the experiences and perceptions of male student teachers, we believe this site was fertile ground to explore this phenomenological qualitative study as the institution has made provisions to train males as teachers.

As Creswell (2014) posits, a qualitative research explores the meanings ascribed to social problems by individuals or groups. Therefore, we have captured the experiences and perceptions of three final year male student teachers which are aligned with the research questions that guided the study. The participants, who have been assigned the pseudonyms Daniel Thomas, Tony Brown, and Lionel Taylor, were purposefully selected as we were convinced that, based on interactions with them on varying occasions and through observations, they were wealthy sources of information related to the topic which was understudied. The participants' ages range from twenty-four to twenty-nine and at the time of the study they were all pursuing undergraduate studies with the aim of attaining Bachelor of Education degrees in the content areas of Mathematics, History and Social Studies and Modern Languages. Only three participants were selected to participate in this study as I concur with Marshall and Rossman (2015) who declared that if a qualitative study is to have depth and craft relationship with participants it is imperative to have a small sample size.

Data Collection and Analysis Procedures

Data for this study were gathered through a triangulated approach. The three primary sources from which data were gathered were a focus group interview, journals entries, and feedback documents provided to student teachers by their college supervisors. A total of sixteen feedback receipts were reviewed during data analysis while fifteen journal entries were studied. The focus group interview within which Daniel, Tony and Lionel participated lasted for two

hours. Having gathered data through the sources as stated earlier, it was imperative to analyze the data using Saldaña's (2009) approach to qualitative data analysis. This data analysis involved using codes as saliently and symbolic attributes which were then grouped into categories which subsequently evolved into themes. Analytic memos were also utilized to aid with data analysis. After all, "they don't just report data; they tie together different pieces of data into a recognizable cluster" (Miles et al., 2014, p. 96). A thematic approach was also utilized to assist with the analysis of the data. This was done because Smith and Sparkes (2016) asserted that a thematic analysis "can provide analyses of people's experiences in relation to an issue, or the factors and processes that underlie and influence particular phenomena" (p. 193).

Ethical Considerations and Trustworthiness

It is important to note that I observed ethical considerations in many ways in an effort to respect and protect the involved parties of this research study. Therefore, measures taken to ensure that ethical considerations included: obtaining permission for access to the research site, having participants read and sign consent forms and assigning pseudonyms to the participants in an effort to protect their identities.

In order to ensure optimal trustworthiness for this paper, throughout the study approximately fifteen peer reviewers provided feedback on varying sections. At this time, too, I hasten to declare to readers that while I work as an educator at the tertiary level, the findings presented are those which emerged from the triangulation of data to ensure consistency. Additionally, each participant was provided with a copy of the focus group transcript for member checking to ensure that their thoughts and ideas were not misrepresented.

Findings and Discussions

After careful review and analysis of the data four broad themes emerged. These themes were (a) Evolving from Student Teacher to Teacher, (b) Educators in the Lives of Male Student Teachers, (c) The College Supervisor, and (d) The Cooperating Teacher. These four themes are presented and explored hereafter in an attempt to make meaning of the data obtained.

Evolving from Student Teacher to Teacher

After having interacted with the male student teachers, the data revealed they unanimously declare that their experiences as college students had significant positive effects on them. This theme could therefore be defined as the academic, social, and professional experiences which have contributed the growth and development of the male student teachers who participated in the study. The participants have collectively described their college experience as a holistic development which has caused them to garner immense knowledge regarding professionalism, socialisation and content knowledge. The commendations which were expressed ranged from high levels of enthusiasm to enter the teaching profession, being anxious to put into practice what they have learned as well as opining that the training is a complete package. It must, however, be noted that it was expressed that the training received has so far only been useful to an extent.

All three participants advanced that their individual development has been impacted in various ways. Tony Brown believed his experiences as a student teacher have caused him to be more tolerant of others and open-minded to the views which others may advance. He wrote: "I have learnt to respect people from different background which helps me in the socialisation process because I am better able to accept their views and ideas" (Tony Brown, Journal entry,

May 10, 2018). General discourse with lecturers also seemed to have impacted the participants as Lionel Taylor expressed, “I always try to start meaningful and professional conversations with the lecturers which always end up in me learning something to incorporate in my professional development” (Journal entry, May 6, 2018). These testimonies therefore confirm that the participants do believe that they have attained a higher level of maturity in their thinking and their dispositions as emerging teachers. In addition, Daniel articulated, “I think that the training institution and the training we receive is really beneficial” (Focus group interview, April 17, 2018). This growth was also evident from data revealed from the supervisors’ feedback. One supervisor wrote, “Teacher exudes confidence...has a very good rapport with students” (Supervisor feedback receipt, November 15, 2017). Another comment that was noted was expressed as: “*ESTOY MUY ORGULLOSA DE TI*” (translation: I AM VERY PROUD OF YOU; supervisor feedback receipt, October 5, 2017). The supervisor went on to further write, “It was a good lesson and I encourage you to build on your strengths and improve your weak areas” (Supervision feedback receipt, October 5, 2017). These revelations are therefore aligned with positive feedback traits postulated by Nolan and Hoover (2004).

The data also revealed mixed reactions of the participants regarding some of the challenges with which male teachers are faced within a school environment. For the most part, the participants expressed, as male teachers when they were on teaching practice, the experiences which they encountered were a mixture of good and bad. The participants revealed, as male teachers, they demonstrated dominance and authority within their classrooms. As Tony Brown expressed: “When a male shows his dominance within a classroom it tends to bring a maximum amount of, ah, control in the classroom” (Focus group interview, April 17, 2018). But, while the participants declared that their gender provides them with an advantage over their female counterparts, they caution that working with female students can prove difficult and situations can become complicated. All three participants recounted that at some point female students made advances at them whether through text messaging, coded letters or just simply doing it in the classroom in front of their peers. Admittedly, Lionel Taylor registered his level of ill-preparedness to deal with such a situation by stating, “They [lecturers at college] never gave us methods, strategies to combat whatever it is that we will experience as it relates students coming on to us” (Focus group interview, April 17, 2018). In addition, it was expressed, “As males, it is very complicated. It is very difficult to deal with some of the issues that come up in the schools” (Tony Brown, Focus group interview, April 17, 2018). The challenges expressed by the participants therefore areas which would have had an impact on how well prepared they believe they are concerning their overall development as teachers.

While the participants have declared they had reservations working with female students, they have added that their experiences with male students were not the same. In recalling his experience with male students, Lionel Taylor expressed, “Sometimes you can pick up that these male students that they don’t have any male figure...where they are from to kinda look up to” (Focus group interview, April 17, 2018). This experience confirms declarations by Martino and Rezai-Rashti (2010) who advanced that male roles models are essential in averting the underachievement of boys. This was also corroborated when Lionel and Tony recounted experiences from their high school years. Lionel Taylor recounted, “When that male teacher basically talk to me and encourage me...each time he does it I actually feel more and more confident. So that is where the motivation came from for me to do mathematics” (Focus group interview, April 17, 2018). Tony Brown articulated:

It was a male teacher who understood my concerns and understood the path that I was going down and had me understanding that look, you are not the only person that have experienced this and this how you will deal with, and I will not allow you to go down this road. (Focus group interview, April 17, 2018)

These declarations therefore have underscored that the roles of male teachers in the lives of the participants was significant. Consequently, the following theme emerged which explored how the participants of the study were impacted by other educators.

Educators in the Lives of Male Student Teachers

Tony, Lionel, and Daniel, having shared their experiences and perceptions, express their lives have been significantly impacted by primarily male educators, throughout their high school and college journeys. It was noted that all three participants hailed the presence of male lecturers at the college. As Johnson (2008) described, the scarcity of men is not a new phenomenon. Therefore, it is not a surprise that the participants have differing views on the issue of having sufficient male lecturers at the college. Tony, Daniel, and Lionel believe the male lecturers at the college are exemplary in many ways, and they see them as role models. However, all three participants believe that each faculty within the college should have at least one male lecturer. In referring to a specific department which has only female faculty with male and female student teachers, Daniel expressed:

You will find that the advice from the female lecturers might give to the male students that they could try in their classes might not be as effective as opposed to if it came from a male teacher who has been in the situation before. (Focus group interview, April 17, 2018).

Additionally, Lionel asserted, “It really helps when you have someone who has been in a position that you might find yourself in and it kinda helps to save you from putting yourself through certain troubles” (Focus group interview, April 17, 2018). These sentiments are therefore suggesting that the participants perceive that the presence of male educators would contribute positively to their overall development as male teachers.

As Hunt et al. (2015) argued, student teachers do not only engage in providing instructions during teaching practicum, but they also engage in general non-instructional activities which facilitate metacognitive development. It is therefore suggestive that the male student teachers emulate traits of their male lecturers. Some of the they admire include spirituality, deportment, passion for teaching, and discipline. According to Lionel, “He [the male lecturer] encourages us seh [English translation: saying] listen, ‘do not leave out God in anything that you do.’ And for me personally, when I actually do what he says or what he encourages I tend to find that things are done easier” (Focus group interview, April 17, 2018). An interesting point to note, however, was Daniel shared that though there are male lecturers who he sees as role models, his experiences have been primarily influenced by female teachers. He recounts, “I am at teachers’ college, this college in particular because of my [female] Spanish teacher, my English teacher and a few others. Most of my motivators were females” (Daniel Thomas, Focus group interview, April 17, 2018). This declaration would later reveal the implications that Daniel had while he engaged in teaching practicum whilst having a male college supervisor. To therefore conclude this theme, it could be summarised as defining educators in the lives of these male student teachers as being impactful especially educators of the same gender.

The College Supervisor

To commence the exploration of this theme which emerged from the study, it is important to recall Bate and Burbank (2008) viewed the role of the supervisor as vital as it should equip student teachers with experiences that promote alternative ways of teaching and

the development of metacognitive development. The sentiments echoed by the participants ranged from one of them believing that he had the worst supervisor to another describing his supervisor as excellent.

On the one hand, two of the participants described their college supervisors as aiding with classroom control, words of encouragement, sharing research articles with strategies for improving, and providing beneficial feedback during teaching practicum. However, some of the less favourable beliefs shared included: one student teacher being primarily assessed rather than supervised, very little to no communication between student teacher and supervisor, being assessed for things which were not taught in classes, variations in standards of supervisors, and an initial dislike for working with a male college supervisor. In describing his experience with his supervisor, one participant declared, “I think my supervisors and my assessors, I think I had the worst. I saw where my supervision was basically coming and seeing me and giving me a grade” (Tony Brown, Focus group interview, April 17, 2018). Notes from his journal entry stated, “My college supervisor did not give much help to my preparation and that placed me at a disadvantage in scoring a good grade on teaching practice” (Journal entry, May 5, 2018). The data from the supervisor feedback comments also seemed to have been saturated by comments which could be argued as not being developmental. The supervisor wrote, “The classroom was dirty... you failed to plan for this class...if you had written a new plan, you would have been clear in your mind what the topic for the day is” (See supervisor feedback receipt 2137 - 2138, October 30, 2017). These comments could therefore be viewed as not being aligned with the three approaches to aiding student teachers during the decision-making process as advanced by Sullivan and Glanz (2005).

On the contrary, Lionel articulated, “When she [his college supervisor] came she made it clear that she’s here just to see what is happening, give me strategies on how to make this better or what to do” (Focus group interview, April 17, 2018). “She always emphasize that I take the time out to do adequate research on the topics that I will teach, and also on strategies that will help me to manage my instructions and overall classroom well (Lionel Taylor, journal entry, May 6, 2018). It is also interesting to note Daniel, who professed he was highly influenced by female teachers, had difficulties with his college supervisor who was a male. Daniel is quoted as saying

I guess having a male supervisor for me was the issue because all of my academic life it was mainly a female behind me all the way or supporting me... I should have been appreciating the feedback that was being given [but] I was refusing it and held up some level of resistance towards it which was fuelled by the dislike of having a male teacher guiding me. (Focus group interview, April 17, 2018)

However, despite admitting that he initially had challenges with his college supervisor, Daniel expressed, “My supervisor has helped me to understand what it means to be disciplined and to be a teacher of integrity” (Journal entry, May 5, 2018). The supervisor is quoted as noting: “There is an overall improvement in how instruction was delivered” (See supervisor feedback receipt 3068, September 27, 2017). This growth was also evident in Daniel’s journal entry when he wrote, “He (supervisor) models the behaviour well for his students to see. He allows you to reflect on the ways you may have grown and will affirm you when you ought to be” (Journal entry, May 5, 2018). The contrasts therefore in the views articulated by Daniel Thomas would suggest then that though Daniel was initially uncomfortable with having a male college supervisor, the experiences have caused him to have a change perspective regarding the impact of a male supervisor.

As Sharp (2001) argued, supervisors should demonstrate proficiency in observational skills, effective pedagogical practices and evaluation and conferencing skills. To begin with the latter, the testimonials revealed that two of the three participants believe they had little to no form of communication with their college supervisors. Tony said, “The communication for me was very bad because I never had the chance of speaking to my lecturers. From third year, I have never sat with one of my supervisors and they have gone through my lesson plan. Never!” (Focus group interview, April 17, 2018). Lionel revealed, “We don’t really rap. If it’s not an instance where she is looking on my folder or anything that relates to the practicum, it’s like I just walk pass. We don’t really chit chat, none at all. It’s just strictly with the practicum” (Focus group interview, April 17, 2018). On the other hand, Daniel said:

The supervisor was always the one who was making himself available and actually tried to ensure that I was being catered to for my own growth and I was the one who would always try to run away from it out of fear of not being able to communicate with a male based on my experience throughout the past. (Focus group interview, April 17, 2018).

One supervisor wrote, “Student teacher was not present at work/school. There was also no communique to inform supervisor of such” (Supervisor feedback receipt 4657, November 8, 2017). Daniel also admitted he viewed his other supervisor, who was a female, as being excellent and he benefited from her supervisory skills and approaches. These revelations by Daniel could therefore be seen as the need for male teachers to be integral in the early years of male students’ development. Having explored this theme, the data would lead to it being defined as the college supervisor being integral in the holistic development of male student teachers. This is also supported by claims made by Lionel when he credited his supervisor’s guidance for his transformation in planning and executing his lessons.

The Cooperating Teacher

Prior to the discussion of this theme, I hasten to remind that Hunt et al. (2015) asserted within the composition of the student teaching triad, the role of the cooperating teacher is as important as that of the college supervisor. It is noted that for the most part all three participants praised their cooperating teachers for the support that they would have received during their practicum exercise. Generally, the cooperating teachers were described as exceptional, helpful, and amazing. Some of the cooperating teachers were commended for the positive relationships that they fostered, the assistance they provided regarding lesson planning, the delivery of instruction, as well as the financial assistance. These revelations, therefore, confirm arguments put forward by Jones, Kelsey, and Brown (2014) who regard cooperating teachers as being proficient in their craft and able to guide student teachers through demonstration, conversation, and coaching. This also would support Roofe and Cook’s (2017) position that the cooperating teacher is critical in the student teachers’ development. As described in the words of Lionel:

He supports me when I was about to be externally assessed. He said “Sir, don’t come a school tomorrow. Stay home, mek [English translation: make/prepare] you lesson plans, do you thing and come back the next day when you a get assess. Mi wi [English translation: I will] teach the class tomorrow just no come here tomorrow. (Focus group interview, April 17, 2018).

Additionally, in expressing his gratitude for his cooperating teachers Daniel wrote, “From their experiences, they were able to guide me based on best recommended practise(s) in the

classroom. At the same time, they did not rob me of the opportunity to develop my pedagogical skills” (Journal entry, May 5, 2018).

Though the participants have all concurred that they profited immensely from some of their cooperating teachers, Roofe and Cook (2017) have also cautioned cooperating teachers need to be equipped for the supervisory duties that they assume when they are assigned student teachers. It is therefore not by surprise that at least one of the participants expressed limited support was rendered. In describing his experience with one of his cooperating teachers Lionel articulated that

She was kinda limited in terms of knowledge. I don't think she did her best because sometimes she would just be there sitting down and I'm there working on the board and a student would be there talking and sometimes and she don't even attend to dem. She just there and she probably just step out, “Sir mi soon come. I will be back in a few” and an hour past and she has not returned.

The same student teacher also expressed, “Even when it came down to report day she wanted me to write up the reports and everything.” Consequently, these testimonials are suggestive that all cooperating teachers should understand the role they play within the student teaching triad.

Conclusion

Having analysed the testimonials, experiences, and perceptions of the three male student teachers and aligning them with the two research questions suggestive conclusions are drawn. In answering the first research question which sought to capture the views that the three male student teachers have of themselves as emerging teachers, it could be concluded they see themselves as being ready to take on the task of teaching and being roles models for students, especially to male students. In relation to this question, it could be concluded, for the most part, male educators have had significant impact on these male student teachers which has influenced their decision to become teachers themselves. Daniel, Tony, and Lionel are confident that the training that they have received has provided them with the necessary foundations to enter the profession of teaching. However, it is imperative that they receive structured assistance especially concerning advances that may be made by female students.

Having reviewed the comments of the participants and aligning them with the second question of the study which required the participants to describe the quality and level of supervision received from their college supervisors and cooperating teachers, the conclusion could be drawn that, student teachers have mixed reactions. I, therefore, conclude that all college supervisors should expend conscious efforts to continue to support, mentor and guide student teachers as they undergo teaching practice. The conclusion is also drawn in concert with Nolan and Hoover (2004) that supervisors must provide feedback and support to student teachers as scaffolding takes place through inquiry and reflection. As it regards the cooperating teacher, I conclude that they indeed play a vital role in the overall development of student teachers. However, more concerted efforts should be manifested to have all cooperating teachers prepared and equipped with the competencies and dispositions to effectively mentor student teachers during teaching practice. Based on the conclusions drawn from this study, it might be useful if there were more consistent and in-depth exploration of the experiences of Jamaican male teachers.

Implications and Recommendations

Having concluded this study, I would like to advance some implications and recommendations which may prove useful to the supervision and development of male student teachers. Based on the findings of the study I would recommend that teacher training institutions attract more males to pursue teacher training and to enter the field of teaching as this should increase the number of positive male role models for students, especially for boys. School boards of teacher training institutions should also seek to hire and retain more male faculty who demonstrate dispositions, characteristics, and competencies worthy of emulation. The study also suggests that concerted efforts should be made to retain and support (beginning) male teachers in the profession especially with issues of relationship with students. Concerning college supervisors and cooperating teachers, the study suggested that the former should understand and distinguish between supervision and assessment for student teachers to become recipients of critical feedback for improvement. Additionally, college supervisors should endeavour to establish healthy relationships with their supervisees. The recommendation is also suggested that cooperating teachers should be exposed and trained in supervisory management of neophyte teachers. Finally, the study suggested that both the college supervisor and cooperating teacher should work closer together in an effort to improve the overall quality of supervision of student teachers when they undertake their various stints of teaching practicum.

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